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SUBJECT: SENEGAL: ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM OR GERRYMANDERING?

11. (SBU) Summary: On February 1, Senegal's National Assembly passed a law to increase the number of administrative regions from 11 to 14, fulfilling an election promise that President Abdoulaye Wade made in February 2007. Described by Wade as an effort to bring government closer to citizens, opposition and civil society leaders denounced the reform as a democratic setback, an undermining of national cohesion and an attempt to further weaken the opposition.  
END SUMMARY.

#### Administrative Dissection

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12. (SBU) The goal of the reform is to carve out of three current regions -- Kolda, Kaolack and Tambacounda -- three new regions. Thus the areas of Sedhiou, Kaffrine and Kedougou have now become full-fledged administrative regions. In Senegal's unitary state system, regions retain a certain prestige as they are headed by an appointed governor who acts as the local representative of the president while exercising the authority of the central government as the chief executive of the central government's activities in the area. In providing a rationale for the law, the government indicated that "The regions of Kolda, Kaolack, and Tambacounda represent 48 per cent of the national territory but are characterized by administrative inefficiency, lack of social cohesion, and no common destiny." Yet, beneath this rationale lies a political strategy that aims to boost the ruling Senegalese Democratic Party's (PDS) chances in the May local elections. By elevating districts into regions, Wade is creating a mood of regional pride while adding all the glamour of having a governor as the highest-ranked local executive as well as the concomitant promotion of political elites into newly created elective positions such as president of Regional Councils or rural town mayors.

#### WHY THESE THREE AREAS?

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14. (SBU) In the Casamance region in the south, Sedhiou's leaders have always expressed frustrations that Ziguinchor gets all the attention though Sedhiou was the first capital of the region. The GOS's plan is to satisfy these demands and at the same time distance Sedhiou from the Casamance conflict by giving them the idea that their destiny is in their own hands. The peoples of Kedougou, ethnic minorities mainly, will see this reform as an opportunity to unburden themselves of the image of a remote area to which subversive civil servants are banished. It is also another positive signal for the area after Senegalese First Lady Viviane Wade's initiative to build a modern hospital in the remote area of Ninefsha, inhabited by the Bedhik tribes who are hardly known by northern Senegalese. By elevating Kedougou into a region Wade is also likely to end the political career of his charismatic opponent, Amath Dansokho, who is the Mayor of the town of Kedougou. As for Kaffrine, it is a significant electoral basin controlled by the opposition. The Alliance of the Forces of Progress's (AFP) Ms. Mata Sy Diallo chairs the Regional Council of Kaolack. The reform will force the opposition to revisit its strategies three months before

the elections and in all likelihood will lose any advantage they might have gained by managing a large region such as Kaolack.

#### FEARS OF THE OPPOSITION

15. (SBU) A leading member of the Socialist Party who is a specialist on decentralization issues told Embassy: "This reform has no economic, geographic, or sociological basis. It's purely political and dangerous for national unity; we are getting closer to creating ethnic regions." He also noted that as chair of the local government of Yenne (thirty miles northeast of Dakar) he had heard that the government plans to create new rural municipalities in his district so that the ruling party can control the area where Dubai's JAFZA is to create an economic zone.

Comment

16. (SBU) Wade's strategy of attracting the best and the brightest of the opposition is now being taken a step further by this chopping up of administrative regions to reduce the political and geographic areas that are under their control. Wade's strategy also plays on the frustrations of people who have long felt marginalized and who will now be under the illusion of being a political center in their own right. At the same time the PDS gains an opportunity to add new players to its political base. Yet, in terms of economic development and consolidation of grassroots democracy, the multiplication of administrative and political institutions that use scarce resources to support themselves does not seem to be an advance for Senegal's democracy.

SMITH